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**A COMPLETE RECEPTION OF THE LATIN  
CORPUS DIONYSIACUM: THE COMMENTARIES  
OF DENYS THE CARTHUSIAN**

In this essay, I shall discuss (1) the fundamental role of Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite in the thought and writings of Denys the Carthusian; (2) Denys' library of Dionysian materials; (3) why Denys used the translations of Eriugena; (4) the nature and style of Denys' commentaries; (5) Denys' treatment of the « foremost difficulties » arising in Dionysius' teaching; (6) Denys' exposition of Dionysius' words concerning the mysterious figure of Hierotheus, who is the exemplar of the communication of theological wisdom.

I. DIONYSIUS CARTUSIENSIS AND DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITA

Denys the Carthusian (Dionysius Cartusiensis, 1402-1471), Chartermonk of Roermond, was the most prolific Latin writer of the Middle Ages. He wrote commentaries on every book of sacred Scripture; encyclopedic commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, which report and adjudicate the arguments of the most important thirteenth-century Scholastic theologians, from William of Auxerre through Durand of Saint-Pourçain and Duns Scotus; commentaries on the works of John Cassian and the *Scala paradisi* of John Climacus; a large *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus* and over 900 sermons; a line-by-line commentary on Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae*, which interprets its literal philosophic meaning and then its allegorical theological meaning; scores of philosophical, theological, moral, devotional and monastic treati-

ses. In the library of his writings Denys attempted to represent and organize the complete paideia of Christian wisdom from ancient times until his own day, in each of its specific modes of inquiry and teaching<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, at the end of his life in the years 1461-1466, Denys commented on all of the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, including the Epistles. In his dedicatory letter to the Dionysian commentaries, addressed to Cardinal Erardus de Marka, Denys' sixteenth-century editor, Dirk Loër of Cologne, states that « our Denys the Carthusian, a man no less illuminated by divine revelation than learned in human disciplines, alone among all the other commentators is the first to elucidate all of the works of Dionysius the Areopagite as one finds them in the Latin tongue; moreover, if you consider Denys' own erudition, you will also find him second to none ». Loër adds that Denys has explained the sublime and extraordinarily difficult books of Dionysius in such a way that even those men who have only a middling knowledge of letters may come to understand them<sup>2</sup>. This intention, we shall see, befits the

<sup>1</sup> For Denys' writings, see K. EMERY, JR., *Dionysii Cartusienensis Opera selecta (Prolegomena). Bibliotheca manuscripta IA-IB: Studia bibliographia* (CCCM 121-121a), Turnhout, 1991. All references to Denys' writings in this paper are to *Doctoris Ecstatici D. DIONYSII CARTUSIANI Opera omnia*, 42 in 44 vols, cura et labore monachorum sacri ordinis Cartusienensis, Montreuil-sur-Mer – Tournai – Parkminster, 1896-1935; henceforward abbreviated *Op. om.* (vol. and page numbers will be cited in parentheses). Denys' commentaries on Dionysius' writings are found in *Op. om.* 15-16. In the following notes, I shall abbreviate the titles of Denys' Dionysian commentaries: *Commentaria in librum De coelesti hierarchia* = *In CH*; *Commentaria in librum De ecclesiastica hierarchia* = *In EH*; *Commentaria in librum De divinis nominibus* = *In DN*; *Commentaria in librum De mystica theologia* = *In MT*; *Commentaria in Epistolas* = *In Ep. (Epp.)*. Medieval library-citations of Denys' commentaries are simpler than the titles given in the edition, e.g., *Super Mysticam theologiam*.

<sup>2</sup> THEODORICUS LOER A STRATIS, *Epistola nuncupatoria* (in *Op. om.* 15: xii).

hierarchical, human communication of divine wisdom, as taught by Dionysius himself.

« What is first in the order of intention is last in the order of execution ». Although Denys did not comment on Dionysius until the end of his life, after he had completed all of his other writings, it is evident that he had read and reread the works of his namesake from the beginning of his monastic life. In a list of the authors he had read, which he compiled in the 1440s, Denys calls Dionysius « my most-elect teacher »<sup>3</sup>. Elsewhere I have shown that Denys considers Dionysius the ultimate authority in theology and in philosophy too, insofar as he treats philosophical matters. In the first philosophical book of *De lumine christianae theoriae*, for example, written in the 1450s, Denys demonstrates that every Peripatetic and Platonic philosopher, Greek and Arab, erred in some way concerning the emanation of creatures from God. Only *Dionysius magnus philosophus* understood the emanation of creatures from God correctly, and it is in the light of his writings that the finest insights of the philosophers may be saved. Likewise, in his commentaries on the *Sentences*, Denys often adduces Dionysius' teaching as a kind of *regula intellectus fidei*. If a Scholastic opinion is found to be dissonant with the teaching of Dionysius, it is *ipso facto* erroneous or at least inadequate. Conversely, if a Scholastic opinion especially illumines the words of Dionysius, it should be admired and embraced as being more acute and probable<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> DENYS THE CARTHUSIAN, *Protestatio ad superiorem suum* (*Op. om.* 1: lxxi-lxxii, and 41: 625-26). A collection of Denys' epithets for Dionysius is found in G.E.M. VOS DE WAEL, *De Mystica Theologia van Dionysius Mysticus in de werken van Dionysius Cartusianus*, Nijmegen, 1942, pp. 11-13.

<sup>4</sup> Several of the essays I cite are reprinted in the volume, K. EMERY, JR., *Monastic, Scholastic and Mystical Theologies from the Later Middle Ages* (Variorum Collected Studies Series), Aldershot, 1996. In the following references and subsequent notes, I cite this volume as Variorum CS, with its item number, in parentheses after the citation of the original publication. For Dionysius' authority in Denys' Scholastic writings, see K. EMERY, JR.,

My claim in this essay goes further. At the end of the Middle Ages, in the solitude of his Charterhouse, Denys the Carthusian conceived the whole enterprise of theological pedagogy essentially as an amplified exposition of the dense and contracted writings of Dionysius the Areopagite. As far as I know, no one in the Latin West before or after him ever conceived the teaching of theology in this way.

If my argument is correct, Denys' conception of theological pedagogy raises many questions. According to an hierarchical order of theological wisdom, he must conceive Dionysius' writings as an exposition of the truths revealed in sacred Scriptures, which otherwise, in Dionysian terms, might seem to proceed at the low degree of symbolic theology, surpassed by higher forms of rational speculation, like the philosophic interpretation of poetic myths. (This is a question intrinsic to the Dionysian corpus itself.) Furthermore, it must be shown that all of Denys' diverse writings are embraced by, and situated within, explicit Dionysian orders of theological wisdom.

Throughout his writings Denys repeats hierarchical schemes that indicate the latter. Divine wisdom as communicated to human minds follows a threefold descending order, from mystical to intelligible to symbolic theology. The *via purgativa* comprises moral doctrine and devotional exercise, which are necessary prerequisites of all theological understanding. The *via illuminativa* at its lower end corresponds with the discursive reasoning of Scholastic theology and at its upper

« Twofold Wisdom and Contemplation in Denys of Ryckel (Dionysius Carthusiensis, 1402-1471) », in *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 18 (1988), pp. 99-134 (Variorum CS, item VI); ID., « Denys the Carthusian and the Doxography of Scholastic Theology », in *Ad litteram: Authoritative Texts and their Medieval Readers*, edd. M.D. JORDAN / K. EMERY, JR, Notre Dame, 1992, pp. 327-359 (Variorum CS, item IX); ID., « *Sapientissimus Aristoteles* and *Theologicissimus Dionysius*: The Reading of Aristotle and the Understanding of Nature in Denys the Carthusian », in *Mensch und Natur im Mittelalter*, edd. A. ZIMMERMANN / A. SPEER (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 21/2), Berlin – New York, 1992, pp. 572-606 (Variorum CS, item VII).

end with the abstract contemplation of the divine essence and its attributes. The *via unitiva* corresponds with the intuitive understanding of mystical theology. According to another hierarchical scheme, which he proposes in many texts and according to which he classifies his own writings, Denys defines a threefold order of wisdom, theology, grace and nature. Mystical theology is identical with the highest degree of the supernatural gift of wisdom, and may be defined as a « supernatural wisdom supernaturally bestowed ». Scholastic theology is essentially a grace given for the benefit of others, and may be defined as « supernatural wisdom naturally acquired ». Philosophy, which insofar as it discovers truths about God and the soul grounds and ratifies truths also known through revelation, may be defined as a « natural wisdom naturally acquired »<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, in his important treatise *De contemplatione*, written in the mid-1440s, Denys elaborates a fivefold order of species of

<sup>5</sup> For Denys' treatments of various Dionysian distinctions among theologies (metaphorical and symbolic; proper, speculative and affirmative; negative and mystical), see, e.g., *De contemplatione* 3 aa.1-5 (*Op. om.* 41: 255A'-260B'), and *Elementatio theologica* props. 7-10 (*Op. om.* 33: 118B-120A'). In this essay, obviously, I cannot trace and compare Denys' interpretations of Dionysian teachings throughout his huge corpus of writings. Concerning the threefold distinction of wisdom (the distinction is first twofold, between natural and supernatural wisdom, and threefold when supernatural wisdom is further divided), see K. EMERY, JR., « Theology as a Science: The Teaching of Denys of Ryckel (Dionysius Cartusianus, 1402-1471) », in *Knowledge and the Sciences in Medieval Philosophy* (Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Medieval Philosophy: S.I.E.P.M.), vol. 3, edd. R. TYÖRNOJA / A.I. LEHTINEN / D. FØLLESDAL, Helsinki, 1990, pp. 377-378 (Variorum CS, item VIII); ID., « Twofold Wisdom », esp. pp. 108-113; ID., « Denys the Carthusian and the Doxography », pp. 328-330; ID., « The Matter and Order of Philosophy according to Denys the Carthusian », in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?*, edd. J.A. AERTSEN / A. SPEER (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 26), Berlin – New York, 1998, pp. 667-679. See also D. WASERMANN, *Dionysius der Kartäuser: Einführung in Werk und Gedankenwelt* (Analecta Cartusiana 133), Salzburg, 1996, pp. 97-104.

contemplation, which he derives directly from the first three chapters of *De divinis nominibus*: (1) The unity and distinctions of the Trinity, knowledge of which is a strictly supernatural; (2) the simplicity and proper attributes of God, knowledge of which philosophers attain by natural reason but which Christians likewise receive enveloped in the stronger light of supernatural understanding; (3) the humanity of Christ; (4) the gifts of glory and grace reflected in creatures; (5) the gifts of nature reflected in creatures. One should remark two features of this hierarchical order. The humanity of Christ considered in itself is lower in the order of cognition than consideration of the divine simplicity, which may also be attained by philosophers who are not Christians. Knowledge of the divine names, in turn, has two faces: as they may be known by philosophical abstraction, and as they are received through divine illumination from above. For the Christian who receives the healing and elevating workings of sanctifying grace, these modes exist simultaneously. Finally, in its highest form affirmative or positive knowledge of the divine simplicity and attributes exists in a dialectical relationship with the negative way of mystical theology<sup>6</sup>. At some point in nearly each of his writings, Denys defines the scope and intention of his text in terms of one of these hierarchical orders.

## II. DENYS' *CORPUS DIONYSIACUM*

Denys availed himself of nearly the whole Dionysian library available to the Latin world of the Middle Ages. His commentaries on Dionysius' four major treatises expound the Latin translations of John Scottus Eriugena. But for purposes of clarification he often adduces the translations of John the Saracen (Sarracenus) and

<sup>6</sup> DENYS, *De contemplatione* 1 aa.26-71 (*Op. om.* 41: 165B'-229D').

Ambrogio Traversari (Ambrosius Camaldulensis), as well as the paraphrases of Thomas Gallus (Vercellensis). He likewise refers to Robert Grosseteste's (Lincolniensis) translations of *De coelesti hierarchia* and *De mystica theologia*. Denys bases his commentaries for nine of the Epistles (1-8, 11) on the translation by Sarracenus and for two others on the translation by Traversari (Epistles 9-10).

Denys quotes the prefatory material to the corpus by Anastasius the Librarian and Eriugena, and he cites the glosses and comments of Maximus the Confessor throughout. Sometimes Maximus is cited simply as « the Commentator », a status he holds vis-à-vis the Dionysian corpus by analogy with Averroës' status vis-à-vis the Aristotelian writings. We know that many of the glosses transmitted under the name of 'Maximus' were in fact excerpted from other writings, including Eriugena's *Periphyseon*<sup>7</sup>.

In his commentary on *De coelesti hierarchia*, Denys refers to commentaries by Eriugena, Sarracenus and Robert Grosseteste, and he frequently cites and quotes Hugh of Saint-Victor's well-known commentary on that work. Denys likewise refers to Grosseteste's commentary on *De mystica theologia*<sup>8</sup>. Denys also

<sup>7</sup> In the edition of Denys' commentaries on Dionysius (*Op. om.* 15-16), the Latin translation of Eriugena is printed at the beginning of each chapter of the commentaries; the translations of Sarracenus, Traversari and Marsilio Ficino and the paraphrases of Thomas Gallus are printed at the end of each chapter or of each treatise. For a study of the glosses of Maximus, pseudo-Maximus, and those surreptitiously culled from Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, see H.F. DONDAINE, *Le corpus dionysien de l'Université de Paris au XIIIe siècle*, Rome, 1953, *passim* and Appendices IV-IX, pp. 135-141.

<sup>8</sup> G.E.M. VOS DE WAEL, *De Mystica Theologia...* (cf. nt. 3), pp. 94-100, 105-111, 129-134, 147-159, 188-194, 219-223, shows that Denys often quoted from Grosseteste's translation of *De mystica theologia* in his earlier writings. For Grosseteste's translations and commentaries on Dionysius' writings, see S.H. THOMSON, *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, 1235-1253*, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 51-58, 78-80. For Thomas Gallus' commen-

read Albert the Great's commentaries on all the items in the corpus; he often disputes Albert's interpretations and notes the contradictions of his teachings from one writing to another<sup>9</sup>.

Throughout his commentaries, moreover, Denys refers to opposite texts in Thomas Aquinas' commentary on the *Sentences*, *Summa theologiae*, *Summa contra gentiles*, and commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate*. Significantly, he never refers to Thomas' commentary on *De divinis nominibus*; one must simply assume that he did not know it. Perhaps this is just as well. In all of his writings Denys esteems Thomas as the greatest Scholastic doctor and he engages his teaching in detail. But he severely criticizes Thomas on fundamental doctrines concerning the soul and its knowledge, not least Thomas' teaching that the human mind must have recourse to phantasms in every act of knowledge<sup>10</sup>. Because

tary (*Explanatio*) on *De mystica theologia*, see J.J. MCEVOY, « Thomas Gallus, Abbas Vercellensis and the Commentary on the *De mystica theologia* Ascribed to Iohannes Scottus Eriugena », in *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honor of John Dillon*, ed. J.J. CLEARY, Aldershot, 1999, pp. 389-405. The Dionysian commentaries of Thomas Gallus often circulated with those of Grosseteste.

<sup>9</sup> For example, DENYS, *In CH* c.10 a.58 (*Op. om.* 15: 198B-C'), says that Albert, in his commentary on the same work, insinuates that each angel is its own species, but in other works he says that all angels are of the same species. Likewise, in his commentary on *De coelestia hierarchia* Albert implies that the human mind cannot understand without recourse to phantasms, but he says the opposite in *De intellectu et intelligibili*. Further, in his commentary on the celestial hierarchy Albert attributes the diversity of intellectual dispositions to their varying degrees of proximity to the One and Pure Act and not to diverse cominglings of contraries in their composition. This would imply that each human rational soul, like angelic intelligences, is specific. But again, Albert teaches differently in his *De homine* and in his commentary on *De anima*. For Denys' remarks in other writings concerning Albert's contradictions, see K. EMERY, JR., « Denys the Carthusian and the Doxography » (cf. nt. 4), pp. 338-339. I intend a separate study of this topic.

<sup>10</sup> See K. EMERY, JR., « Twofold Wisdom » (cf. nt. 4), pp. 120-123; « *Sapientissimus Aristoteles* », pp. 579-580; ID., « Denys the Carthusian and the



Thomas' theory of human cognition determines his doctrine concerning predication of the divine names, Denys would have been constrained to criticize his interpretation of Dionysius throughout. As it stands, Denys in his commentaries several times argues that Thomas' doctrine concerning phantasms falsifies and undermines Dionysius' express teaching (see below).

Denys frequently confirms and clarifies Dionysius' teaching by reference to corresponding passages in John the Damascene's *De fide orthodoxa*, in the Latin translation of Burgundio of Pisa<sup>11</sup>. Significantly, he likewise confirms and ratifies Dionysius' teaching by quotations of philosophical theorems, propositions and texts from Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, the *Liber de causis*, Avicbron's *Fons vitae*, Boethius' *De consolacione*, and Plato's *Timaeus*, *Meno* and *Phaedo*<sup>12</sup>. Unlike many modern Christian commentators, he is not

Doxography » (cf. nt. 4), pp. 347-348; ID., « Did Denys the Carthusian also Read Henricus Bate? », in *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale* 32 (1990), pp. 198-203. For Denys' teaching on the role of phantasms in meditation (as distinct from contemplation) in his earliest writing, see my « Denys the Carthusian and Traditions of Meditation: 'Contra detestabilem cordis inordinationem' », in *Monastic, Scholastic and Mystical Theologies* (Variorum CS, item IV), pp. 1-26.

<sup>11</sup> IOHANNES DAMASCENUS, *De fide orthodoxa: Versions of BURGUNDIO and CERBANUS*, ed. E.M. BUYTAERT (Franciscan Institute Text Series 3), St. Bonaventure, N.Y. – Louvain – Paderborn, 1955.

<sup>12</sup> PROCLUS, *Elementatio theologica, translata a GUILLELMO DE MORBECCA*, ed. H. BOESE (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy Series 1: 5), Leuven, 1987; « Le *Liber de causis* », ed. A. PATTIN, in *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 4 (1966), pp. 90-203; AVENCEBROLIS (IBN GEBIROL), *Fons vitae ex Arabico in Latinum translatus ab IOHANNE HISPANO ET DOMINICO GUNDASALINO*, ed. C. BAEUMKER, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* 1 (Münster, 1895); PLATO: *Meno interprete HENRICO ARISTIPPO*, ed. V. KORDEUTER (Plato Latinus 1), London, 1940; *Phaedo interprete HENRICO ARISTIPPO*, ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO (Plato Latinus 2), London, 1950; *Timaeus a CALCIDIO translatus commentarioque instructus*, edd. P.J. JENSEN / J.H. WASZINK, London – Leiden, 1975.

at all embarrassed by the resonances of Dionysius' teaching with the doctrines of pagan philosophers. Rather, he delights in remarking their fundamental identity. As Berthold of Moosburg assembled a catena of Dionysian texts to ratify the theorems of Proclus, so conversely Denys assembles a catena of Proclus' theorems to ratify lemmata of Dionysius' text. Denys dismisses the late-medieval opinion that Proclus derived his teaching from the apostolic Dionysius; rather, Denys says, it is not surprising that they often say the same thing. Proclus was the greatest interpreter of Plato's thought, formulating into theorems the basic principles of what Plato taught; Dionysius, in turn, adopted whatever is true in Platonic philosophy and corrected what was erroneous<sup>13</sup>. From Thomas Aquinas, I presume, Denys learned the connection between the *Liber de causis* and the *Elements* of Proclus. On at least one crucial point, however, Denys identifies Proclus as *Platonicus* and the author of the *Liber* as *Peripateticus*. The tenor of Proclus' words suggests, Denys says, that he conceived the ideal, formal principles of things (e.g., the Good, Being, Life, Intelligence) as separately-subsistent, distinct realities, though understanding his meaning is extremely difficult; following Aristotle's criticism of Plato, the author of the *Liber* denies

<sup>13</sup> DENYS, *In CH* c.1 a.6 (*Op. om.* 15: 20B-D'). See Denys' *De lumine christianaе theoriae* 1 a.103 (*Op. om.* 33: 379A): « Profundissimus autem Platoniorum Proclus, qui pene totam mentem Platonis in theorematibus suae Theologicae elementationis dignoscitur expressisse... »; *In DN* c.4 a.30 (*Op. om.* 16: 130A-B), Denys says: « Summus et sanctus iste philosophus noster magnus Dionysius, ista et consimilia quae ex philosophia et naturali lumine didicit et cognovit, theologicis suis immiscuit libris, in quantum ea quae fidei sunt et in Scripturis habentur, per ea clarius intelliguntur. Etenim ista naturalem rationem secundum simplicem intelligentiam non excedunt, et a philosophis sunt conscripta, praesertim a Proclo ex documentis Platonis ». Denys, *In Ep. VII ad Polycarpum* (*Op. om.* 16: 520D), remarks: « Et verum est quod S. Dionysius philosophica sua scientia usus est ad reprobandum quosdam aliquorum Graecorum errores. Hoc tamen egit ex caritate, pro conversione illorum, ad Dei honorem ».

this doctrine and correctly posits that the first principles are identical with God, as does Dionysius himself<sup>14</sup>.

It seems likely that Denys' Dionysian commentaries only existed in his autograph manuscripts, which do not survive<sup>15</sup>. Nor do we know the manuscripts in which he read the body of Dionysian materials. From the disposition of the text of his commentaries, however, one may in part infer the instruments of his research. He evidently had access to a manuscript collection of Dionysian texts and apparatus for reading them similar to the Parisian collection studied by H.F. Dondaine. The collection was introduced by prefatory materials of Hilduin, Eriugena and Anastasius the Librarian. The first part of the collection displayed Eriugena's translations of the treatises and letters in large script, accompanied by marginal glosses and comments, anonymous and under the name of 'Maximus'; the text of *De coelestia hierarchia* was surrounded by the commentaries of Hugh of Saint-Victor, Eriugena and Sarracenus. The second part of the Parisian collection contained the *nova translatio* of Sarracenus, and the third part the paraphrases of Thomas Gallus. Denys had all these materials readily at hand<sup>16</sup>. The collection he used,

<sup>14</sup> DENYS, *In CH* c.4 a.21 (*Op. om.* 14: 86A<sup>1</sup>-87B). Proclus « videtur fuisse maximus resolutissimusque Platonicus »; the author of the *Liber de causis*, « qui peripateticus fuit », on this point more evidently conforms with the teaching of Dionysius. Denys adds that Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary on the *Liber*, says that Dionysius corrected the teaching of the Platonists, « declarans idem in re esse primum et per se bonum, primum quoque per se ens, et primum per se vivens, et primum per se intelligens: sicque ab eodem creata participant bonitatem et essentiam, vitam et intellectum ». The Latin translation of the *Liber* lacked the first four propositions of the original Arabic text; had he known those, Denys' opinion would have been different.

<sup>15</sup> K. EMERY, JR., *Dionysii Cartusiensis... Bibliotheca manuscripta IA* (CCCM 121) (cf. nt. 1), pp. 28-37. A copy of Denys' commentary *In CH* possibly survives in Zwickau, Ratsschulbibliothek, Cod. VII.8, but I have not yet consulted the manuscript.

<sup>16</sup> See H.F. DONDAINE, *Le corpus Dionysien...* (cf. nt. 7), pp. 15-21, over Paris,

however, evidently did not contain Eriugena's translations of the Epistles; for these he used the translations of Sarracenus and Traversari. If Denys did not borrow Nicholas of Cusa's copy of Traversari's translations, he may have learned of their existence from the Cardinal<sup>17</sup>. Grosseteste's translations and commentaries were not commonly included in continental collections of Dionysian materials, but by the end of the Middle Ages they circulated separately throughout Europe and were sometimes accompanied by the *Explanationes* of Thomas Gallus<sup>18</sup>.

In sum, Denys' commentaries on the writings of Dionysius present an intertextual forest. The modern printed edition of Denys' works offers no *apparatus criticus* or *apparatus fontium*. In their edition of the Dionysian commentaries, however, the editors indicate in the margins many variants between the standard redaction of Eriugena's translations, which they reprint separately, and the text as it appears in Denys' lemmata. These variants may be the means whereby to search the actual manuscripts Denys used, if they still exist, or at least a copy of a collection similar to his.

Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 17341. This collection was employed by Albert the Great, who commented on the Dionysian texts at the *Studium* in Cologne. Moreover, the founders of the Thomist and Albertist *Bursae* at the University of Cologne migrated there from Paris. Thus, it is not unlikely that Denys, who studied at Cologne and continued to correspond with, and borrow books from, masters and students at the University, encountered the collection there.

<sup>17</sup> Cusanus' copy (Bernkastel-Kues, St. Nikolaus-Hospital, Cod. 43) does not contain the Epistles; see J. MARX, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften-Sammlung der Hospitals zu Kues bei Bernkastel a.d. Mosel*, Trier, 1905, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> See note 8, above, and J.J. MCEVOY, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, Oxford – New York, 1982, p. 62 nt. 89.

## III. WHY DENYS USED THE TRANSLATIONS OF ERIUGENA

Denys did not choose to comment upon the translation of Eriugena only because it held the central place in his collection of Dionysian materials. He surely judged that Eriugena's translation was the most authentic, because of its antiquity and because of its compressed, unaccustomed manner of expression. Such expression is characteristic of those who, like Hierotheus and Dionysius themselves, partake a higher, unified cognition of divine realities, which must be amplified in more discursive terms by commentators who are not so illuminated. Accordingly, Denys treats the translations of Sarracenus and Traversari as essentially paraphrases in terms more accustomed to « modern » Latins. The actual paraphrases of Thomas Gallus, in this perspective, represent the next level of descent in hierarchical communication. Indeed, in Denys' mind Eriugena is more than an accurate grammatical translator; rather he partook hierarchically the cognitive illumination of the one whose writings he translated. Eriugena was a *vir illuminatus... homo doctissimus, et idiomatis Graeci peritus*. Denys quotes Anastasius the Librarian, who says that it was miraculous that a barbarian living at the ends of the earth was able to understand the profound things Dionysius wrote. Eriugena was able to do so because he was illumined by the Holy Spirit, who likewise made him ardent in love and eloquent in speech<sup>19</sup>. For this reason, among the translations of the Latins the words of Eriugena contain the most anagogic energy (*vis*) for leading the mind upwards to God.

<sup>19</sup> DENYS, *In CH* c.1 a.5 (*Op. om.* 15: 16B'-C'). The prefatory letter of Anastasius Bibliothecarius is printed in the same volume, pp. xv-xvii (quotation, p. xv).

## IV. THE NATURE AND STYLE OF DENYS' COMMENTARIES

On each work of the Dionysian corpus Denys wrote phrase-by-phrase running commentaries, wherein he expands and glosses the sense of Dionysius' words in more familiar Scholastic terms. He further supplies scriptural texts that confirm Dionysius' meaning and, as I have pointed out, where apposite he adduces texts from Proclus, the *Liber de causis*, Plato and others that ratify the Areopagite's teaching in the philosophical order. Generally, Denys refers to other commentaries (e.g., of Hugh, Grosseteste and Albert) in order to clarify obscure matters or correct possible misinterpretations; only on crucial issues does he dispute their interpretations dialectically in the text of his commentary. He often refers readers, however, to the extended treatment of disputed questions in his commentaries on the first two books of the *Sentences* and in other treatises.

Following the standard Latin order of the corpus, Denys first commented on *De coelesti hierarchia*. This commentary bespeaks the model he probably intended for all of them but later found too time-consuming to execute. Denys subdivides his commentary on each chapter of the Dionysian text into articles. At the end of most chapters of *De coelesti hierarchia* — and sometimes in the middle of the chapter — he devotes articles to *quaestiones* arising in the text. At the end of the commentary he adds six more articles (86-91) that treat special questions concerning angels. These usually abbreviate questions he had already treated at length in his commentary on the second Book of the *Sentences*. Indeed, throughout the commentary he refers to his writings on the *Sentences*, urging the reader to search there to find the resolution of problematic points in Dionysius' text. Formally speaking, Denys amplified Dionysius' teaching discursively not only in his proper commentaries on Dionysius' texts but even more in his commentaries on the *Sentences* and other philosophical and theological treatises. In effect, those other writings served as a preparation for what was first in Denys' intention but last in execution: his exposition of the contracted words of theological wisdom of the *Princeps theologorum... theologicissimus Dionysius*.

In Chapter 2 of *De coelesti hierarchia*, for example, Dionysius propounds his famous doctrine of *dissimiles similitudines*, teaching that God and the immaterial angelic substances are known better by human minds through images that are obviously unlike them than through intelligible names (abstract conceptions) that otherwise seem closer to their completely spiritual natures. This is especially so concerning knowledge of the « superessentialis Divinitatis beatitudinem », which « est enim super omnem essentiam et vitam, nullo quidem lumine ipsam [*Denys: eam*] characterizante, omnique ratione et intellectu similitudine ipsius incomparabiliter derelictis »<sup>20</sup>; consequently, human minds are likely to be deceived by their own abstract conceptions of God and spiritual beings, which derive from material creatures and originate in their own thoughts, whereas material images obviously more distant from God and spiritual beings are less likely to be confused with their objects and so motivate human minds to rise above them. This doctrine looks forward to *De divinis nominibus* and *De mystica theologia*; likewise, it raises questions that are central to Denys' whole theological and philosophical enterprise, and to his integral understanding of the Dionysian corpus.

First of all, Denys says, Dionysius' words suggest that God and spiritual beings are designated more appropriately through negative terms and « dissimilar » images than through affirmative and positive names. Thus, Dionysius' teaching seems to contradict the general principles of knowing. Ordinarily, the naming of something is ordered to knowledge of what it is, not to what it is not. Again, cognition occurs through a certain assimilation of the knower to the thing known, which causes a similitude of the thing cognized to exist in the one who cognizes; positive, more noble names of God and incorporeal beings are more similar to them than material images. Moreover, by how much more an effect

<sup>20</sup> For the lemma and comment, see DENYS, *In CH c.2 a.11* (*Op. om.* 15: 44B-C). Eriugena's translation is in the same volume, pp. 32-33.

conforms to its cause, by that much more clearly it represents the cause and is a more transparent medium of it. Denys responds briefly by way of a distinction: speaking directly and in respect of the nature of the thing in itself, from the part of the object and of the medium, God and immaterial, divine beings are known more clearly and more eminently through affirmative and more noble names; speaking indirectly and in respect of the imbecility and defectiveness of human minds, the opposite is true. Thus, in the beginning it is easier to grasp what God and the deiform minds are not than what they are, especially since many human minds cannot rise above sense and imagination. In itself (*in se*), however, cognition through affirmative and similar things is more perfect, distinct and closer to knowledge of its object *per speciem*. Yet in *De mystica theologia*, Dionysius teaches that the most perfect contemplation of God in this life is an « intuition » by which we are united with God in an wholly unknown manner. This is because of our weakness, and because whatever we can conceive affirmatively of God pertains to him more excellently and perfectly than we can conceive; thus, we deny those things of him, not simply and absolutely, as regards what they are in their own nature, but insofar as we can grasp them. Denys postpones further treatment of this crucial question until his commentaries on *De divinis nominibus* and *De mystica theologia*<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, his brief response here adumbrates his treatment of the question in the latter work, which involves a threefold order of abstraction and positive predication, culminating in an abstraction that attains the divine attributes as they exist in themselves, and a distinction between the abstractions of affirmative theology and the intuition of mystical theology (see below).

<sup>21</sup> DENYS, *In CH c.2 a.16* (*Op. om.* 15: 59D-60A'). In earlier treatises, Denys addressed the problem of divine predication often, always in terms of Dionysius' affirmative and negative theologies, but always as a philosophical question; cf. *De lumine* 1 aa.19-23 (*Op. om.* 33: 252B'-257C); *De natura aeterni et veri Dei* aa.30-34 (*Op. om.* 34: 51D'-58C); *Elementatio philosophica* props. 78, 82-84 (*Op. om.* 33: 86D'-87A', 89D-91D).



A second question is closely related to the first: Whether through created things we are able to know (*cognoscere*) anything truly and quidditatively about God? Dionysius' words (« God is above every essence and life... every understanding, reason and similitude fall infinitely short of him »), Denys says, imply that we cannot know about God by means of the knowledge of any creature. This question entails « an ocean of difficulties and an abyss of other questions », namely (1) Whether something pertains to God and creatures univocally? (2) Whether we can know God intuitively in this life? (3) Whether we can conceive anything truly, distinctly or properly about God? (4) Whether God is in a genus? (5) Whether « perfectional predicates » *ex natura rei* are prior and pertain more to God than those abstracted from creatures? Again, Denys promises to treat these questions in his commentaries on *De divinis nominibus* and *De mystica theologia*, and he refers readers to his solutions of them in his commentary on the first Book of the *Sentences*<sup>22</sup>.

Concerning a third question, Dionysius' teaching is clear: angels are purely immaterial creatures and are not composed of matter and form. On this point Dionysius corrected the Platonists, for Plato himself, Apuleius, Proclus, the author of the *Liber de causis* and Avicbron all posited some kind of matter in angelic beings or the Intelligences; in this they were followed by many Christian fathers (Origen, Augustine, Basil, Cassian) and some Scholastic doctors (Bonaventure, Richard of Middleton). Aristotle and his Peripatetic followers, on the other hand, taught that the

<sup>22</sup> DENYS, *In CH* c.2 a.16 (*Op. om.* 15: 60B'-D'). Denys recites and analyzes the opinions of many Scholastic doctors concerning the questions listed here and many others pertaining to predication of the divine names in his *In I Sent.* d.3 q.1, d.8 qq.2 and 6 (*Op. om.* 19: 215B-221D', 362D-369B, 390D'-401B), d.22 qq.1-4 (*Op. om.* 20: 133C-149C'). One finds Denys' synthetic treatment of these issues in the works cited in note 21, above. In *Elem. theol.* prop. 11 (*Op. om.* 33: 120A'-121D'), Denys poses a special question: « Quaestio magna est, an in vita praesenti possit homo intuitiva cognitione Deum cognoscere » (see below).

Intelligences are separated substances, completely free and removed from matter; on this point Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome and their followers strongly agreed with them. This opinion is widely accepted as more probable, Denys says, mainly because it is more consonant with the doctrine of Dionysius. Here Denys refers the reader to his diffuse treatment of the question in his commentary on the second Book of the *Sentences*<sup>23</sup>.

Denys' brief responses to these questions indicate a guiding intention of his vast speculative and literary undertaking: to reconcile Latin Scholastic theology with Dionysius' authoritative teaching concerning the knowledge of God and mystical theology. In this effort, Denys mediated two extremes, which are in fact correlative: on the one hand, the teaching of some Latin, Scholastic theologians (Albert and perhaps Thomas, see below) that all positive predication of God is rooted in creatures and does not attain the divine being itself, so that the *via negativa* of mystical theology represents a kind of « pious agnosticism », and, on the other hand, the teaching of many monastic writers that mystical union with God is completely affective, utterly beyond any cognition in the intellect<sup>24</sup>. Denys

<sup>23</sup> DENYS, *In CH* c.2 a.16 (*Op. om.* 15: 60D'-61C'); cf. *In II Sent.* d.3 q.1 (*Op. om.* 21: 185C'-203A').

<sup>24</sup> One cannot fail to observe that the « agnostic » interpretation of the *via negativa* was at the center of the disputes between Barlaam and Gregory Palamas in Byzantium. The affective interpretation of mystical theology, whereby love enters into God leaving intellect behind (hence the « unknowingness ») was taught by Hugh of Saint-Victor, firmly established by Thomas Gallus, followed by Bonaventure, et al. It was radically codified by the Carthusian, Hugh of Balma, whose treatise on mystical theology was very influential in the later Middle Ages: HUGHES DE BALMA, *Théologie mystique: Theologia mystica*, 2 vols., ed. et trad. de F. RUELO, intro. et apparat crit. de J. BARBET (*Sources chrétiennes* 408-409). Hugh's teaching was especially popular among Denys' Carthusian confrères; the affective interpretation also gained authority through the mystical writings of Jean Gerson. For Denys' response to Hugh and Gerson, see K. EMERY, JR., « Twofold Wisdom » (cf. nt. 4), esp. pp. 129-134.

found justification for his interpretation in the Dionysian corpus itself, wherein the intelligible theology and affirmative predication of *De divinis nominibus* are dialectically reciprocal with the *via negativa* of mystical theology, which penetrates the inaccessible light and which is beyond all negations as well as affirmations. In this respect, it is historically significant that the many late-medieval, monastic teachers of mystical theology, whose writings were extremely popular in Denys' milieu, effectively detached Dionysius' *De mystica theologia* from the rest of his corpus; correspondingly, as far as I know Denys was the first Latin writer since Francis of Meyronnes in the early fourteenth century to comment directly on Dionysius' *De divinis nominibus*<sup>25</sup>. (Of course, manuscript research will uncover other commentators.)

In his commentary on *De divinis nominibus* Denys abandoned the practice of treating *quaestiones* in separate articles. If one discovers an « abyss of questions » in *De coelesti hierarchia*, even more questions arise from the text of *De divinis nominibus*. For that reason, Denys says, « here I do not intend to dwell or embark upon anything but the exposition of the text, and not the ventilation

<sup>25</sup> In his *Flores Dionysii*, Francis of Meyronnes (†1325) included and commented upon 45 « points » from *De divinis nominibus*; his interpretations largely depend on the expositions of Thomas Gallus. See B. ROTH, *Franz von Mayronis, O.F.M.: Sein Leben, seine Werke, seine Lehre vom Formalunterscheid in Gott* (Franziskanische Forschungen: Heft 3), Werl in Westf., 1936, pp. 167-171; J. BARBET, « Le prologue du commentaire dionysien de François de Meyronnes, O.F.M. », in *Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 21 (1954), pp. 183-191. The dearth of commentaries on *De divinis nominibus* after the thirteenth century may be explained by several reasons: (1) the difficulty of the work, beyond the abilities of most students in the theology faculty; (2) fundamental changes in the conception of theological science; (3) the fact that questions concerning divine predication were anyway treated thoroughly in questions in the *Sentences*; (4) pious, affective interpreters of *De mystica theologia* were not concerned with relating that text to the highly intellectual problematic of *De divinis nominibus*.

of questions, innumerable of which can be introduced here and which I have expedited in [my commentary on] the first Book of the *Sentences* »<sup>26</sup>. In his running comment, he simply points out the questions and doubts arising from the text, briefly indicates what the proper and improper interpretations are, and refers the reader to his extended treatment in other works.

Denys' cross-references to his own writings not only look backwards but forward to his commentary on *De mystica theologia*. At the end of his commentary on that work, he presents a series of « Brief and Necessary Absolutions of the Foremost Difficulties in the Preceding Books » of Dionysius. Here Denys resumes « the difficult questions » concerning the cognition of God and divine predication that he resolved briefly in his commentaries on *De coelesti hierarchia* and *De divinis nominibus*; these questions at the end of his commentary on *De mystica theologia* represent his final solutions to the problems that had preoccupied him, in varying ways, from the beginning of his career. The main difficulties encountered in Dionysius' writings are these: (1) What kind of cognition or vision of God is possible in this life and in the next? (2) Whether in the contemplation or vision of mystical theology the human mind sees or understands God himself truly and objectively, and whether the mind sees him abstractively or intuitively, and whether the mind may have a distinct, proper and quidditative concept of God or only a confused and general notion? (3) What is the definition of mystical theology, what is its object and what is its subject? (4) Whether the ancient philosophers attained some natural theological knowledge similar to the wisdom of Christians? (5) How one may obtain the height and perfection of mystical theology<sup>27</sup>. In this essay, I can only summarize Denys' treatment of the first two crucial and related questions.

<sup>26</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.1 a.1 (*Op. om.* 16: 8B). Similarly, Denys does not introduce special *quaestiones* into his running-commentary on *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*.

<sup>27</sup> DENYS, *Difficultatum praecipuarum praecedentium librorum Absolutio-*

## V. THE « FOREMOST DIFFICULTIES » IN DIONYSIUS' WRITINGS

In the first question, Denys establishes the beatific vision as the ultimate standard or limit-paradigm of human cognition against which one must evaluate all lower forms of cognition *in via*. Here, if modern scholars are right, Denys directly confronts a fundamental difference between Greek and Latin conceptions of beatitude. For Denys, the distinction between cognition of God *in via* and *in patria* depends upon the distinction between knowledge *that* the divine essence is (*quia est*) and *what it is* (*quid est*). On the contrary, Albert the Great, in his commentary on *De divinis nominibus*, argues that even in beatitude the soul does not apprehend the divine essence immediately and quidditatively but only in higher and higher illuminations or « theophanies » *quia est*. (Thus it would seem that his words fall under the Parisian Condemnations of 1241.)<sup>28</sup> Denys counters Albert's argument with the teaching of Thomas Aquinas,

*nes breves et necessariae* (*Op. om.* 16: 481A-495B'). Henceforward I abbreviate these questions *Absolutiones*.

<sup>28</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.1 (*Op. om.* 16: 482B'-C'). Denys quotes ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Dionysium de Divinis nominibus* c.1 ( « An divina substantia possit ab aliquo intellectu creato videri », sol.), ed. P. SIMON, in *Sancti doctoris ecclesiae Alberti Magni Opera omnia* (Editio Coloniensis) 37.1, Münster, 1972, p. 10 lines 64-72. DENYS, *In Ep. I ad Caium* and *In Ep. V ad Dorotheum* (*Op. om.* 16: 503D'-504B', 514B'-D'), censures the same error of Albert; he quotes ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Dionysii Ep. I* and *Super Ep. V* (q.1 « De visione Dei », sol.), ed. P. SIMON, in *Editio Coloniensis* 37.2, Münster, 1978, pp. 481 lines 37-60, 495 lines 33-43. For the Condemnations of 1241, see C. TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII* (Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 289), Rome, 1995, pp. 115-185 (with full bibliography); Trottmann thinks the incriminated doctrine derives as much or more from the philosophy of Avicenna, adopted by Latin theologians, as from the interpretation of Dionysius and other eastern fathers. For Albert's teaching on the beatific vision, see TROTTMANN, pp. 283-302.

which concludes that the « blessed *in patria* will see the divine essence clearly and immediately, since the divine essence itself (by means of the *lumen gloriae*) will be united with them as an intelligible species, similitude or form... and thus for the blessed the divine essence is the object and form or, as it were, the *medium intelligendi* ». In the beatific vision the soul attains an immediate, quidditative but not comprehensive cognition of the divine essence. Denys also refers to the dogmatic constitution of Pope Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* (1336), which declares that the saints in heaven « have seen, see and will see the divine essence by an intuitive and facial vision... immediately, nakedly and clearly »<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, Denys comments, Albert's words do not sound rightly, because the cognition *quia est* of God that he attributes to the blessed « may be had also in the present life; such cognition is obscure, *per speculum in aenigmate*, and does not serve to quiet the mind and make it content »<sup>30</sup>. Denys may be referring to the theological knowledge of the divine attributes, attained through various degrees of abstraction, or he may be referring to the intuitive cognition of God in mystical theology, which yields a direct knowledge of the divine essence *quia est* but not *quid est* (see below). In any event, the cognition of the divine essence *quia est* that Albert posits for beatified souls defines — and is even surpassed by — the intuitive cognition of

<sup>29</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.1 (*Op. om.* 16: 483B-D'). Denys quotes THOMAS AQUINAS, *In IV Sent.* d.49 q.2 a.1 in corp., in *Sancti Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici ordinis praedicatorum Opera omnia* 7.2, Parma, 1857: reprt. New York, 1948, p. 1198a. Denys also quotes BENEDICT XII's *Benedictus Deus*: « Post passionem Christi Sancti viderunt, vident et videbunt in regno coelorum divinam essentiam visione intuitiva et etiam faciali, nulla creatura mediante habente se in ratione visi objecti, sed divina essentia immediate, nude et clare se illis ostende, quam qui vident, eadem divina essentia perfruuntur: ex qua visione atque fruitione, sunt et sine fine erunt vere beati ». For Thomas' teaching on the beatific vision, see C. TROTTMANN, *La vision...* (cf. nt. 28), pp. 302-320, and for Benedict XII (Jacques Fournier), pp. 745-811.

<sup>30</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.1 (*Op. om.* 16: 482C').

mystical theology, which may be attained in this life. At this point Denys does not adduce the authority of Dionysius, who teaches that the contemplation of mystical theology rises above every created intelligible species, reality and being; these words suggest that *a fortiori* Dionysius posited an even more immediate cognition in the beatific vision, that is, a vision of God face-to-face. Thus, not only is Albert's interpretation wrong contextually, but Dionysius himself may be exonerated from the theological error in which some Latin theologians had implicated him<sup>31</sup>.

As is often the case, Albert, *vir valde catholicus*, speaks differently — and better — in another work. In his commentary on *De mystica theologia* he distinguishes between the vision of God face-to-face, which will be enjoyed by the blessed *in patria*, and the vision that Moses experienced when he entered the divine cloud, in which he saw God « in his most noble effects, namely, in theophanies given by grace, which are express similitudes of the divine goodness ». Here Albert affirms that the blessed will see God immediately; the vision that he attributed to the blessed in one commentary he grants to Moses in this life in another. On the latter point, however, Albert is contradicted by the authority of Augustine (and Thomas following him), who in *De videndo Deo* « proves and asserts that Moses in this life saw God *per speciem*, that is, he saw the divine essence clearly and immediately ». Paul also enjoyed a transient, direct vision of the divine essence when he was rapt to the third heaven. « If these servants of God, while still living in the flesh, thus saw the divine essence », Denys asks, « how much more will the blessed *in patria* beatifically and unceasingly gaze upon it (*intuentur*)?<sup>32</sup> »

<sup>31</sup> The interpretation of Dionysius, which attributes to him the doctrine that the blessed will see God through theophanies, was influenced by texts of Eriugena, which were incorporated as glosses in collections of Dionysius' writings; see C. TROTMANN, *La vision...* (cf. nt. 28) pp. 74-83 and 131-140 *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.1 (*Op. om.* 16: 482C-483B'). Denys quotes ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Dionysii Mysticam theologiam* c.1 (q.3 ad 1), ed.

In sum, by means of a proper species and the divine essence itself, the blessed will see God clearly and objectively, and will cognize him *quidditative et intuitive*. But they will not comprehend his nature simply and fully, as it is knowable (*cognoscibilis*) in itself; only God himself can comprehend his infinite actuality, entity and perfection. The blessed fall infinitely short of comprehending the divine essence; nevertheless, they see him as he is, their natural capacities are fulfilled, and they are content and at rest. For this reason they are called *comprehensores*<sup>33</sup>. In his first « difficult question », while preserving the utter transcendence and incomprehensibility of God Denys thus establishes the ultimate rule against which all human cognitions *in via* must be measured: the immediate cognition of the divine essence, *quid est*. From his solution one may infer a continuous ascent, in the highest registers of cognition, to the beatific vision of God: an abstract cognition *quia est* of the divine attributes; an intuitive cognition *quia est* of the divine being in mystical theology; the immediate, transitory vision of the divine essence *in raptu* (e.g., Moses and Paul); the permanent vision of God face-to-face. This continuous ascent is explicit in the following questions.

In his second question, Denys treats the affirmative knowledge of God through the divine names and the negative knowledge of mystical theology as inseparably and dialectically linked. In order to evaluate various theories concerning the affirmative predication of God's « proper » or « perfectional » attributes — that is, of « those things which it is always better to have than not to have » (from Anselm, Henry of Ghent) — Denys lays down a criteriological standard:

P. SIMON, in *Editio Coloniensis* 37.2, Münster, 1978, p. 464 lines 30-37. Denys refers to AUGUSTINUS, *Liber De videndo Deo seu Epistula 147*, ed. M. SCHMAUS (*Florilegium Patristicum* fasc. 23), Bonn, 1930, pp. 10-11 et sqq. Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* 1a q.12 a.11 ad 2, and *ST* 2a2ae q.175 aa.3-6. For Denys' treatment of the transitory vision of the divine essence *in raptu*, which in *De contemplatione* he attributes to other saints besides Moses and Paul, see K. EMERY, JR., « Twofold Wisdom » (cf. nt. 4), pp. 132-133.

<sup>33</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 488C-A').



Every actual, real and true intellection has a true and real object; both affirmative and negative cognitions of God are true, real and actual cognitions of him; therefore, they pertain to, are fixed-in, and intend (or penetrate into) a real and true object (that is, God himself). Otherwise they would be vain, fantastic and frivolous apprehensions. Thus, the real object of these cognitions is either created being (*ens*) or uncreated being; if the object is uncreated being, then what we propose is established; if the object is created being, then those affirmative and negative cognitions of God are false, since no created being properly speaking may be predicated or verified concerning the more-than-most-blessed (*superbeatissimo*) God of infinite excellence<sup>34</sup>.

Denys next states arguments that the perfectional attributes of God (e.g., his *actus purus*) are predicated properly of him and not « metaphorically, symbolically or translately » since such attributes cannot be verified of any being but God, in whom there is no accident; that negative propositions about God are not pure privations, which have no place in his invariable essence, but presuppose some positive intuition of his being; and that in this life we may only attain an *a posteriori* knowledge of God *quia est*, not an *a priori* knowledge of him *quid est*<sup>35</sup>.

These arguments, which express Denys' concern that the cognitions of affirmative and negative theology be rooted in the divine being itself and not merely be human conceptions derived from creatures for « speaking about God », would seem to be contradicted by Greek au-

<sup>34</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 484B-C): « In omni intellectione actuali, reali et vera, est aliquod verum et reale objectum. Sed utraque ista Dei cognitio, est vera, realis et actualis intellectio Dei. Ergo habet verum et reale objectum circa quod versatur, et cui infigitur ac intendit: alioqui esset apprehensio vana, phantastica et frivola. Hoc ergo objectum reale, vel est ens creatum, aut increatum: si increatum, habet propositum; si creatum, omnes illae cognitiones seu contemplationes sunt falsae, quum nullum ens creatum proprie dicatur, praedicetur aut verificetur de superbeatissimo infinitae excellentiae Deo ».

<sup>35</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 484C-D').

thorities. For Dionysius himself says that « if someone who sees God understands what he sees, he does not see God himself but something that revolves around him »; likewise, John the Damascene says that « whatever affirmatively we say about God does not reveal his nature but those things that revolve around his nature... or something that follows from his nature or operation ». Denys counters these *dicta* with Latin authorities. In his *Dialogues*, Gregory the Great reports saint Benedict's direct vision of the divine essence in this life; the « glorious father Bernard » (i.e., William of Saint-Thierry) also teaches the possibility of such a vision in this life; Jerome in his *Regula* says that he was often rapt for long periods, during which he looked upon the uncreated light of the Trinity directly; indeed, « many of the saints many times in this life were rapt into the riches of the glory of God, and absorbed in the abyss of the immense light »<sup>36</sup>. Denys must steer his solution between these opposing authorities, east and west, between shadows and light.

There are those, Denys acknowledges, who say that mystical awareness (*notitia*) of God is only experimental in the supreme affect of the soul, which is united to the deity by love alone. Here and in his other writings, he rejects this widespread interpretation of mystical theology, which avoids altogether the intellectual problem posed by his authorities. Next he surveys theories of abstraction

<sup>36</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 484D'-485B'). Denys quotes PS-DIONYSIUS, *Ep. I ad Caium*, interprete JOANNE SARRACENO (in *Op. om.* 16: 501; see Denys' comment, 503C-B'); he cites IOHANNES DAMASCENUS, *De fide orthodoxa* 1 cc.4 and 9, interprete BURGUNDIONE PISANO, pp. 21, 48. See also GRÉGOIRE LE GRAND (GREGORIUS MAGNUS), *Dialogues: Dialogorum Libri 2* c.35, vol. 2, ed. A. DE VOGÜE, trad. P. ANTIN (Sources chrétiennes 260), Paris, 1979, pp. 237-242; PS-HIERONYMUS, *Regula monachorum* c.26, printed in *PL* 30: 414B-C; GUILLAUME DE SAINT-THIERRY (GUILLELMUS DE SANCTO THEODORICO), *Lettre aux frères du Mont-Dieu (Lettre d'or): Epistola ad Fratres de Monte Dei*, ed. et trad. J. DÉCHANET (Sources Chrétiennes 223), Paris, pp. 356-361. For Denys' interpretation of William's text in other writings, see K. EMERY, JR., « Theology as a Science » (cf. nt. 5), pp. 387-388.

and divine predication, which essentially follow an ascending order. Some, like Avicenna and Maimonides, argue that we may predicate attributes of God only by way of negative inferences from the imperfections of creatures or by simple causality. Negatively, we may remove from our considerations of God every opposite privation or defect, so that when we say that God is wisdom, for example, we mean that the defect of foolishness cannot pertain to him; also, by means of one negation we may posit something else about God that follows from it, so that when we say that God is immaterial, for example, we may infer that consequently he is intelligent. By causality, we may predicate of God perfections that we discover in creatures, of which he is the cause. According to those who hold this position, Denys says, all things that are said about God and creatures are purely equivocal, for there is no similitude between the Creator and creatures. One may object to this theory of predication for several reasons: (1) it reduces all designations to the same level, so that it is the same thing to say that God is a « stone » or « wood » as to say that he is « good » or « wise » (therefore the theory fails to recognize the difference between symbolic and intelligible or proper theology); (2) since it remains grounded in creatures, such cognition does not lead, according to Denys' criteria, to true cognition of God; (3) likewise the theory seems to deny the words of Scripture concerning intelligent beings, « Let us make man in our own image and similitude » (Genesis 1:26) and « You, Cherub, bear the seal of similitude with God » (Ezechiel 28:14,12); (4) moreover, every effect participates in its cause by way of similarity. Even so, in his commentary on *De mystica theologia* Albert the Great seems to accept this opinion, saying that there is nothing common between God and creatures, either by way of species or genus or even according to the principle of analogy; thus we may not predicate anything truly of God. Albert's words are ill-sounding and can be saved only if he is speaking strictly about predication, that is, if he means that we are unable to signify the quiddity of the divine being<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 486D-487A). Denys quotes

On the contrary, Augustine in *De Trinitate*, Bonaventure in the *Itinerarium*, and Jean Gerson teach a mode of abstraction whereby we may attain a proper, intellectual, absolute concept of the divine being and of his perfectional attributes (e.g., life, goodness, wisdom, power). Such cognition is abstractive and not intuitive, absolute and not only connotative. In this abstraction, from attributes originally abstracted from creatures the human mind conceptually strips all limitations, privations, imperfections, finiteness, etc., referring them, insofar as the mind still considers them, to its own imperfect and limited conceptualization. Thus stripped, an absolute and proper concept of God results in the mind; as Gerson (following Dionysius) says, such abstraction leaves a certain *agalma* of God's being in the mind, much as a figure emerges as the remainder in the stone that the sculptor chisels away. One should note that this abstraction is as much a negative as a positive knowledge; it brings affirmative theology to the border of the intuition of mystical theology<sup>38</sup>.

ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Myst. theol.* c.2 q.2 ad 3 (Editio Coloniensis 37.2), p. 467 lines 53-60. As far as Maimonides is concerned, Denys seems to have changed his mind from an earlier writing. In *De nat. aet. et veri Dei* a.31 (*Op. om.* 34: 53C-55B) he defends Rabbi Moses against the charges of Thomas Aquinas: « non ergo Rabbi Moyses tam absolute tamque simpliciter adstruit nil positive ac substantialiter dici de Deo, ut recitat Thomas: praesertim quum Rabbi Moyses saepius dicat, omnium creaturarum perfectiones excellentissime et unitissime seu simplicissime summo ac sancto Creatori inesse... positioni ejus in tantum consentio, in quantum documentis Dionysii... potero eam esse concordem ostendere » (54B-C).

<sup>38</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 485C'-486C). Denys (485C-486B) quotes JEAN GERSON, *De mystica theologia practica*, ed. P. GLORIEUX, in *Oeuvres complètes* 8, Paris, 1971, p. 45. The other references are included in Gerson's text: AUGUSTINUS, *De Trinitate* 8 (3.4-5), ed. W.J. MOUNTAIN (CCSL 50), Turnhout, 1968, pp. 206-207; BONAVENTURA, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* c.6, cura PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura, in *Doctoris Seraphici s. Bonaventurae Opera omnia* 5, Quaracchi, 1891, pp. 310-312.

Here and elsewhere Denys argues that such abstractive cognition of the perfectional attributes of God may be acquired naturally by the human mind. But as Dionysius teaches, cognition of the divine names likewise descends into the mind through a supernatural illumination coming from the Father of lights. This descending illumination is a direct infusion into the mind of certain « created similitudes or lights » coming from God, conveyed through the supernatural gifts of *intellectus* and *sapientia*. Thus, it would seem that the « theophanies » that Albert posits for the knowledge of beatified souls Denys transfers to the highest form of cognition of the divine attributes in this life<sup>39</sup>.

In the first « difficult question » Denys explains abstractive knowledge and positive predication of the divine names in semantic terms. In every name one must consider two things, the *res significata* and the *modus significandi*. Since names for God are imposed by us and are at first abstracted from creatures, they are always deficient in representing the divine perfection as far as the *modus significandi* is concerned. There are, however, certain names that signify perfections principally exemplified by, and derived from, God (e.g., *bonitas*, *veritas*, *sapientia*). We are able to consider these perfections « absolutely », in themselves, without considering the specific way they are participated by creatures in this or that manner, which determines the mode of signification. Names that are imposed to signify such perfections, absolutely considered, are predicated properly of God, and, as regards what they signify (but not their *modus significandi*), they pertain to him prior to any creature<sup>40</sup>.

In his commentary on *De divinis nominibus*, Denys speaks of our abstractive knowledge in terms that he borrows from Henry of Ghent. As Dionysius teaches, « the perfections of all essential

<sup>39</sup> Cf. DENYS, *De contemplatione* 1 aa.42-44 (*Op. om.* 41: 184C-188A, esp. 186B').

<sup>40</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.1 (*Op. om.* 16: 481B'-482B).

cognitions and virtues are superessentially pre-comprehended » in the superessential divine ray, that is, Denys comments, the principles, reasons and quidditative definitions of all things pre-exist eternally, ideally and cognitively in the uncreated light; thus, the cognitions of every created intelligence are comprehended by, and find their term in, God, who is everywhere by his essence, presence and power, and falls into (*illabitur*) the essences of all things. Now, as Dionysius says, « all sciences concern existing things » that is, they concern « real objects »; however, since the real, human sciences discover that which cannot be otherwise, they properly concern the *esse essentiae* or *esse quidditativum* of things rather than their *esse existentiae*, for actual existence pertains to supposites, which are subject to mutation. In this life our knowledge of such quiddities terminates in creatures; consequently, since the quiddity of the divine essence is infinitely distant and elongated from every created being, understanding and contemplation, not by place but by the excess of its immense perfection and incomprehensibility, in this life we are not able to gaze upon (*intueri*) God as he abides in his own majesty and glory. But although the *quid est* of the divine essence is wholly unknown to us, its *quia est* or actual existence is most-known to us<sup>41</sup>. This text makes clear

<sup>41</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.1 a.6 (*Op. om.* 16: 23D'-24D'). Denys comments upon PS-DIONYSIUS, *De divinis nominibus* c.1, interprete JOANNE SCOTO ERIUGENA (in *Op. om.* 16: 5-6): « In quo omnes fines omnium cognitionum superarcanæ ante substituti sunt; quem neque intelligere possibile est... et omnium quidem essentialium cognitionum et virtutum summitates, simul et omnes superessentialiter in se praeambientem; omnibus vero incomprehensibili virtute et supercoelestibus animis supercollocatum. Si enim scientiæ omnes existentium sunt, et in ea quæ sunt finem habent; ipsa omnium essentia summa, et ab omni est remota ». For an ample elucidation in similar terms, showing how the divine Ideas flow from the divine unity and in turn unify our minds in transcendental concepts and draw us back to the divine simplicity, cf. DENYS, *In CH* c.1 a.4 (*Op. om.* 15: 11A-12D'). Denys' remark that « notissimum est quia est » (of God) reflects his approval of Anselm's argument that God's existence is *per se notum*; see *De nat. aet. et*

how our cognition of God is at once « real » that is, established in the divine being and not in creatures, yet infinitely distant from any quidditative knowledge of the divine essence; it also suggests that our knowledge of God, in its highest registers, in some manner reverses the pattern of our cognition of created beings, the abstract quiddities of which we may know scientifically but not the features of their individuated, actual existence.

But no matter how elevated abstract cognition may be and no matter how real, it is only a faint intellectual image of the reality it would grasp. As Bonaventure says, there are as many modes of abstraction as there are modes of dissimilarity. The first mode of dissimilarity pertains when things participate the same species but not in the same degree; the second mode pertains when things participate the same genus but not the same species; the third mode pertains when things do not participate the same species but are similar, as beings, only by analogy. Denys precludes knowledge of God by means of the first two modes of abstraction. Therefore he dismisses Duns Scotus' teaching concerning a concept that is univocal and common to God and creatures, and the teaching of Francis of Meyronnes and the *Nominales* that God may be conceived as existing in a logical predicate. If God were in some predicate there would be some genus and difference by which he could be known, described and defined. William of Paris, William of Auxerre and especially Henry of Ghent rightly conclude that God does not belong to any predicate and that nothing concerning him and creatures can be said univocally but only analogically (according to the third mode of abstraction). Their position, Denys says, « is not only truer, more subtle, more reverential and

*veri Dei* a.6 (*Op. om.* 34: 17A'-21D), and *Elem. phil.* prop. 79 (*Op. om.* 33: 87B'-88C). Although Denys had earlier adopted Thomas Aquinas' teaching concerning the distinction between *esse et essentia*, he later rejected it in favor of Henry of Ghent's « intentional distinction » between the *esse essentiae* and *esse actualis existentiae* in creatures; see Denys' *In I Sent.* 1 d.8 q.7 (*Op. om.* 19: 405D-408A'), and *Elem. phil.* prop. 38 (*Op. om.* 33: 50D-53A).

more congruent with the infinite, more-than-incomparable and superessential divine majesty, but is also more consonant with the doctrines of the most-blessed Dionysius, who in his books so often names God supersubstantial, superessential, more-than-great, more-than-wise, as well as ineffable, unknowable, indefinable, and illimitable<sup>42</sup> ».

In these words Denys expresses two types of predication, negative and preeminent (literally, 'superlative'). The latter is the most accurate positive predication of divine names. Such predication is founded on the reality *that (quia est)* such perfections exist in God preeminently, prior to their existence in creatures, but in a way (*quid est*) that is incomprehensible to us. This is the doctrine of the saints, Dionysius and Anselm, and of the leading Scholastics — Thomas Aquinas, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Richard of Middleton, Peter of Tarantaise, Giles of Rome and many others — who teach that we may attribute creaturely perfections to God universally, because all perfections exist united in him; according to plenitude, because in him they exist in infinite perfection; ac-

<sup>42</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 486D, 487B-D): « Quae positio non solum est verior, sed item subtilior, reverentialior et congruentior infinitae superincomparabili et superessentially majestati divinae, ac consonantior beatissimi Dionysii documentis, qui Deum in libris suis tam frequenter supersubstantialem, superessentialem, supermagnum, supersapientem, et prorsus ineffabilem, incognoscibilem, indefinabilem, illimitabilem nominat » (487C-D). For Denys' criticisms of Scotus' notion of the univocity of being, and of the notion of Francis of Meyronnes and the *Nominales* that God may be conceived as in a genus, as well as his affirmation of Henry of Ghent's notion of analogy, see his *In I Sent.* 1 d.3 q.1 and 1 d.8 q.6 (*Op. om.* 19: 217D'-220C, 390D'-401B); *De lumine* 1 aa.82-83 (*Op. pm.* 33: 255A'-257C); *De nat. aet. et veri Dei* a.61 (*Op. om.* 34: 95D-96B'); *Elem. phil.* prop. 84 (*Op. om.* 33: 90A'-91D). In all of these the authority of Dionysius is decisive. For Henry of Ghent's theory of analogy, see R. MACKEN, « Henry of Ghent and Augustine », in *Ad litteram* (note 4, above), pp. 257-261. For Bonaventure, Denys cites *In IV Sent.*; I cannot find the text there.



ording to simplicity, because those things that are diverse and many in creatures are one in God<sup>43</sup>.

Denys concludes his survey of doctrines concerning predication of the divine names by quoting Thomas Aquinas' solution in his commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate* (q.1 a.2). As Thomas argues, by participation in the cause of their being, all created effects evince a certain similitude with their Creator. Thus, although we are unable in this life to attain an immediate knowledge of God *quid est*, *a posteriori* through his effects we may attain a cognition of God *quia est*. Moreover, there are different hierarchical grades of such cognition, for we may know the relation between cause and effect in differing degrees of proximity. Thus, generally in any effect we may see the productive efficacy of God; or we may know God as he is the cause of his more noble effects; or we may know him as he is eminently removed from everything that shines in his created effects. This corresponds with the saying of Dionysius that we know God *ex omnium causalitate, et excessu, et elongatione* (*De divinis nominibus* c.7). The highest degree of knowledge, furthermore, occurs when the natural light of the mind is strengthened and perfected by the supernatural light of faith and the gifts of wisdom and understanding, and by a new illustration from above, whereby the mind elevates itself above itself and knows that God is beyond anything it can apprehend<sup>44</sup>.

Although its terms are formally correct, Thomas' account, Denys says, is vitiated by his constant assertion that the human mind must have recourse to phantasms in every act of knowledge.

<sup>43</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 487A-B). For Denys' accounts of the doctrines of the theologians mentioned, see the questions cited in note 22, above, esp. *In I Sent.* d.22 qq.1-4 (*Op. om.* 20: 133C-149C).

<sup>44</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 487D-488C); THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Boetium De Trinitate* q.1 a.2, ed. P.-M.J. GILS, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia* (Editio Leonina) 50, Rome – Paris, 1992, pp. 83-85; cf. PS-DIONYSIUS, *De divinis nominibus* c.7, interprete SARRACENO (in *Op. om.* 16: 381).

This doctrine is philosophically erroneous. It jeopardizes philosophical demonstration of the immortality of the soul. Moreover, by means of the knowledge of something yielded by its intelligible species, the mind knows the nature of its object more purely and in a more unlimited way than if it returns to its phantasm. Moreover, for the same reason Thomas teaches that the human mind may not be illuminated immediately by the immaterial light of an angelic mind, but that only the mind's phantasms may be so illumined. Does he not think that the simple, immaterial, deiform human mind is more capable of receiving the direct and immediate illumination of the angelic light than sensible phantasms? (Even the philosophers Alfarabi and Avempace taught that by the most abstract cognition — *abstractissima cognitione* — we may know the quiddities of the separated substances; they were wrong only in saying that we could know the ultimate and proper *differentia* of those substances.) Furthermore, Thomas' doctrine contradicts many texts in Scripture and the testimony of many fathers and saints. Not least significantly, his doctrine directly contradicts the teaching of Dionysius. Thomas, indeed, justifies his doctrine of phantasms by quoting Dionysius: « the divine ray cannot enlighten us unless it be wrapped in the various veils of sensible forms » (*De coelestia hierarchia* c.1). But that statement pertains only to the first information of the intellect. What does Thomas think Dionysius means at the beginning of *De mystica theologia* (c.1) where he says: « In mystical visions, rise up in an absolute ascent beyond all things, detached from them all, to the ray of the supersubstantial obscurity, withdrawing absolutely from all things... by abandoning the senses and intellectual acts, all sensible and intelligible realities, and all existing things ». How may one rise above intelligible realities if he cannot rise above phantasms? Likewise, in the same chapter Dionysius says that « the sole cause of all things truly appears unsurrounded-by-veils (*incircumvelate*) to those who transcend all unclean and material realities, and all of the supercelestial souls ». Do you hear what he says, Denys asks, « unsurrounded-by-veils »? Finally, Thomas' doctrine renders « true, real and objective » knowledge of God impossible, for the mind would never rise above the abstraction it derives from sensible species, and thus

would always remain grounded in creatures<sup>45</sup>. No wonder Thomas did not write a commentary on *De mystica theologia*.

For Denys, Dionysius' threefold knowledge of God corresponds with the modes of cognition he has reported: (1) knowledge by « causality » corresponds with the predication taught by Avicenna, Maimonides and Albert; (2) knowledge by way of « excess » corresponds with the purely abstract predication taught by Augustine, Anselm and Bonaventure; (3) knowledge by way of « elongation » corresponds with the cognition of mystical theology. In mystical cognition, the natural light of the mind is strengthened by the supernatural light of faith and the gifts of understanding and wisdom; by a new illustration from above it rises above itself and knows that God is beyond anything it can apprehend. Although the mind cannot see the divine essence, its more-than-excellent light is reflected upon the soul, which reverberates, as it were, with its flashing immensity<sup>46</sup>.

Denys explains the highest affirmative cognition of God's being and proper attributes, which attains a real knowledge of God *quia est*, by analogy with the knowledge of God *quid est* through the light of glory in the beatific vision. In such abstract knowledge, God is the real « object » or *quod*; the created intelligible species, illumined by the gifts of understanding and wisdom, is that by which (*quo*) we know him<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 489A-490D, 490D'-491A). Cf. PS-DIONYSIUS, *De coelestia hierarchia* c.1, interprete ERIUGENA (in *Op. om.* 15: 6), and *De mystica theologia* c.1 (in *Op. om.* 16: 445-446). DENYS, *In CH* a.91 (*Op. om.* 15: 282A-283B'), argues that angelic minds directly illumine human intellects, and criticizes Thomas and his doctrine of phantasms. On Denys, angelic illumination of human minds, and the human mind's ability to know or « contact » separated substances, see K. EMERY, JR., « Twofold Wisdom » (cf. nt. 4), pp. 115-124; ID., « Did Denys the Carthusian also Read Henricus Bate? » (cf. nt. 10), pp. 197-203; ID., « The Matter and Order of Philosophy » (cf. nt. 5), pp. 671-674.

<sup>46</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 488A-C).

<sup>47</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 488A'-B').

This abstractive knowledge of God through his attributes, which are identical in the divine essence, results in the mind through an intuition that penetrates into, and is fixed-in, the divine object. In other words, it is the intuition of mystical theology, which precedes the concepts resulting in the mind, that verifies their « reality ». Even though we cannot know those proper and essential attributes that pertain to God alone clearly and distinctly as they are in themselves, nevertheless by the light that flows from the mind's intuition of the divine object we may have some relatively distinct cognition of such properties, e.g., that he is uncreated, independent, pure, perfect and wholly separated being. Moreover, as Thomas Aquinas says, one cannot know whether something is (*an est*) unless he knows in some way what it is (*quid est*), at least imperfectly and confusedly. Thus, the intuition that yields a knowledge of God's being *quia est* and which supports abstractive cognition of his attributes, according to Thomas' principle presupposes some « obscure and imperfect » knowledge *quid est*<sup>48</sup>.

In the contemplation of mystical theology, the mind becomes aware of the divine object it pierces by its intuition; the *apex mentis* and *vertex intelligentiae*, drawn ever-nearer to a greater knowledge of quiddity (*per appropinquationem grandem notitiam quidditatis*), enters into the divine cloud, or into the blinding, inaccessible light of the divine essence. Leaving all intelligible species behind and suspended above all creatures, wholly absorbed in God and resting in him, the mind is most fervently and sapientially united with God, and most acutely and limpidly gazes on the « superincomprehensibilis et supersplendissimus et superluminosissimus et superpulcherrimus et superamabilissimus et supergaudiosissimus... Dominus Deus omnipotens et immensus ». In this mystical intuition of God *quia est*, the mind realizes how infinitely far it is from a cognition of God in himself and from the facial vision of God and fruition in him that it will enjoy in beatitude<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 490B'-D').

<sup>49</sup> DENYS, *Absolutiones* a.2 (*Op. om.* 16: 488B'-489A). For Denys' inter-

As is evident, throughout the question Denys relies upon Thomas' distinction between the knowledge *quia est* of God that we may have in this life and the knowledge *quid est* that is reserved for the beatific vision. Just as evidently, Denys interprets the distinction quite differently from Thomas. No less, Denys depends on another « very famous and most frequently used distinction » between abstractive and intuitive cognition. This distinction seems to have originated with, and been codified by, Duns Scotus (although many of its basic terms and elements are present in the writings of Henry of Ghent). By the end of the Middle Ages, the distinction had become part of the standard vocabulary of Scholastic theologians in every school. Formally speaking, according to Scotus, abstractive cognition grasps the *esse cognoscibile* of its object by way of a diminished species or intellectual similitude that is indifferent to the object's actual existence or non-existence. Intuitive cognition, in contrast, by means of the mind's penetration into the thing itself (*intueri rem*), attains its object immediately (*rem ipsam immediate*) and really (*in se realiter*), as it actually exists outside the mind (*in sua propria existentia actuali*) and is actually present before it (*praesentialiter existens*). Intuitive cognition is superior to abstractive cognition because of its immediacy and because it guarantees the existence of its object. Scotus and his followers exercised the distinction primarily in a theological context. Abstractive cognition defines the natural knowledge of angels; such cognition also represents the highest kind of knowledge of God and his attributes that human minds may attain in this life, and stands, as it were, between obscure faith and vision; intuitive cognition of God, on the other hand, is reserved for the beatific vision<sup>50</sup>.

pretation of the « divine cloud » as the blinding, inaccessible light, see *In Ep. V ad Dorotheum* (*Op. om.* 16: 513A-514D').

<sup>50</sup> S.J. DAY, *Intuitive Cognition: A Key to the Significance of the Later Scholastics* (Franciscan Institute Publications: Philosophy Series No. 4), St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1947, pp. 39-139; S.D. DUMONT, « Theology as a Science and Duns Scotus's Distinction between Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition », in *Speculum* 64 (1989),

The advantages that Denys found in this distinction are obvious. Like Scotus, he understood the term *intuitio-intuitive* to signify not only a non-discursive intellection but the mind's penetration and immediate gaze into (*intueri*) the actual existence of its object. The common terms of the distinction (e.g., *realiter, immediate, objective, actualiter*) are precisely those he uses as criteria for establishing true cognition (*vera cognitio*) of God and his attributes. At the same time, he completely alters the meaning and application of Scotus' terms. For Denys posits an intuitive cognition of God and his attributes in this life, in mystical theology; he rejects any univocal concept that embraces the being of both God and creatures; consequently, it is mystical intuition and not a univocal concept that guarantees the truth and reality of our knowledge of God; unlike Scotus, he posits a divine illumination of the mind, which comes either directly from God or is mediated through the angelic hierarchies<sup>51</sup>. Such illumination, which

pp. 579-599; A. MAURER, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in the Light of its Principles* (Studies and Texts 133), Toronto, 1999, pp. 473-476 (presents a clear summary). For the way in which Scotus' abstractive knowledge could be construed as a surrogate for Henry of Ghent's special theological illumination or for mystical theology, see S.F. BROWN, « Abstractive Cognition according to Peter of Candia », forthcoming in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*. Mastrius de Meldula says: « De cognitione intuitiva et abstractiva... inter alias cognitionis divisiones haec est famosior et frequentissima » (cited in the literature).

<sup>51</sup> Denys accepted Henry of Ghent's theory of a special illumination of supernatural truths, or a *lumen medium* between faith and vision; see K. EMERY, JR., « Theology as a Science » (cf. nt. 5). Unlike Henry, he argued that the divine light was also mediated to human minds through the angelic hierarchies. For Henry's theory, his relation to the tradition of mystical theology, the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition implicit in articles of his *Summa (quaestiones ordinariae)*, and, in passing, his influence on Denys, see my article, « The Image of God Deep in the Mind: The Continuity of Cognition in Henry of Ghent », in *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277. Philosophie und Theologie an der Universität von Paris im letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts. Studien und Texte* (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 28), edd. J.A. AERTSEN / K. EMERY, JR. / A. SPEER (forthcoming).

flows into the soul from its intuition of the divine being in its *apex mentis*, strengthens, stabilizes and verifies our concepts of God, which, however, cannot attain the divine quiddity. In short, Denys read and judged Scotus, as he did Albert and Thomas, in light of the teachings of the divine Dionysius, *Princeps theologorum*.

## VI. HIROTHEUS: THE COMMUNICATION OF THEOLOGICAL WISDOM

At many places in *De coelesti hierarchia*, Denys encounters another grave difficulty in the sound of Dionysius' words: it might appear that all supernatural illuminations, among the angels themselves and thence in human intellects, are mediated through the celestial hierarchies, so that after the first Seraphic Intelligence, no other mind sees God immediately. Denys argues strenuously against this interpretation of Dionysius' meaning. The whole credibility of Dionysius' teaching, Denys says, hinges on the right understanding of this matter. Now, the law of hierarchical illumination and cognition holds rigorously in the natural order. But by divine grace and glory all angelic and human minds are directed to the same supernatural felicity. Thus, each is rewarded with the same « essential » beatitude: the immediate vision of God face-to-face. At the same time, « accidental » cognitions of the divine light — as it shines in particular effects, in divine mysteries and « certain determined secrets » — are communicated hierarchically, from superior to inferior minds, not only from rank-to-rank but from individual-to-individual within each rank.

Moreover, through the Incarnation of Christ and Eucharistic participation in his Mystical Body, etc., human minds in the ecclesiastical hierarchy are assimilated to the angelic orders. Thus, human beings are worthy of imitating angelic perfection and of leading angelic lives. In the beatific vision human minds may attain a cognitive status equal with the highest angelic orders. And the same law that holds *in patria* applies occasionally, among heroic

contemplative men, *in via*: in mystical visions, human minds may rise above all invisible beings to immediate union with God, as Dionysius states expressly in *De mystica theologia*; no angelic mind mediates mystical union, except perhaps dispositively. In fine, through Baptism, sanctifying grace and the infusion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, our « essential » union with God in this life is immediate, and may be actualized fully in the highest powers of the soul; on the other hand, « accidental » charismatic graces (among which is the science of theology) may be mediated not only through the angelic hierarchies but from one human mind to another. Some who misinterpret Dionysius on this crucial point, Denys says, frequently dismiss his whole teaching about the celestial hierarchies and their operations; others who misunderstand in the same fashion fall into enormous errors and into heresy<sup>52</sup>.

Not only the Apostle Paul, who was rapt to the third heaven and there momentarily saw the divine essence, but also his students Hierotheus and Dionysius are proof that men may live like angels. They also exemplify the relation between mystical vision and hierarchical operation in the communication *sapientiae Christianorum*. This mutual relationship, in Denys' mind, is the hermeneutical key to the Dionysian writings.

Accordingly, in the first three chapters of *De divinis nominibus*, Dionysius situates his discourse on the divine names within a descending hierarchy of theological knowledge and within an hierarchy of human intelligence. He distinguishes between a « discrete » and « united » theology. « Discrete » theology addresses the distinction of persons in the Trinity; it includes discussion of the Incarnate Christ and his acts as the « man-SuperGod » (*vir-SuperDeus*) recorded in the Gospel. The Incarnation bespeaks or points to distinctions among the persons in the trinitarian Godhead. Dionysius tells Timothy that he has written about discrete theology

<sup>52</sup> DENYS, *In CH* c.1 a.7, c.6 a.28, c.7 a.32, c.13 a.68, aa.89-90 (*Op. om.* 15: 25C-26A', 111B'-112A, 125B'-126D, 229B-D, 280A-281C').



in another work titled *De divinis characteribus*. Whether or not this work ever actually existed it is nonetheless formally necessary for indicating the structure of theological wisdom; moreover, Dionysius in fact treats its subject matter in compressed form in *De divinis nominibus*.

For Denys, as for Dionysius himself, human cognition of the wholly transcendent Trinity in this life remains obscure and is never « clear and distinct »<sup>53</sup>; for this reason, one must be moderate, modest and reserved in speaking about the distinctions among the persons, carefully staying within the boundaries of scriptural revelation. Those who (like the Scotists and Nominalists) exploit the doctrine of the Trinity as a pretext for displaying their logical subtlety are presumptuous and should be condemned for doing so. Whereas an imperfect intuition of the divine essence is possible in mystical contemplation, in his *De contemplatione* Denys makes clear that an intuitive and reflective cognition of the trinitarian distinctions is reserved for the beatific vision<sup>54</sup>. In his commentary on the first Book of the *Sentences*, he extensively recites Henry of Ghent's treatment of distinctions among the divine attributes. He remarks that Henry goes beyond all of the Scholastic doctors by speaking of the « rational distinction » among the attributes not only in human minds *in via* but in the mind of God and in the minds of the blessed. In their vision the blessed will see how various sets of divine attributes may be distinguished and reduced to different persons in the Trinity. This rational distinction in the minds of the blessed is founded on a prior distinction in the mind of God, who comprehending his own infinite essence in one intuitive glance, as it were, distinctively sees how he knows himself as true (the Word) and loves himself as good (the Spirit)<sup>55</sup>. That this is so is as much about the trinitarian distinctions *viatores* may know.

<sup>53</sup> It is not insignificant for the history of philosophy that Denys uses these terms as criteria of proper knowledge.

<sup>54</sup> DENYS, *De contemplatione* 1 a.29 (*Op. om.* 41: 169D-170B').

<sup>55</sup> DENYS, *In I Sent.* d.2 q.2 (*Op. om.* 19: 157A-162), quotes Henry's *Quod-*

More commonly, human minds may have some inkling of the distinctions among the persons by way of wholly inadequate material images, such as those Dionysius proposes in *De divinis nominibus*. Further, we may have some apprehension of the distinctions by reference to the spiritual image of the intellectual soul, which provides an analogy for the generation of the divine Word by the Father, and of the spiration of the Spirit by both. Significantly, Denys finds other approaches more suitable for the capacities of human minds in this life; all of these, in effect, regard the Trinity insofar as it is unified in one essence. Thus, Bonaventure shows how the divine persons flow from the Good in itself, identical with the divine essence, the nature of which is to diffuse itself. Moreover, one may profitably contemplate the substantial circumincension of the divine properties, identical with the divine essence, among the persons. Indeed, contemplation of the absolute divine attributes, according to the highest mode of abstraction and negation, is a prerequisite for consideration of the Trinity<sup>56</sup>.

In his descending order of objects of contemplation, Denys places contemplation of the simplicity and attributes of God above the humanity of Christ. Consideration of the divine Word in itself is integral to contemplation of the Trinity. Like Dionysius, in his commentaries on *De divinis nominibus*, Epistles 3-4 to Caius, and elsewhere, Denys considers the Hypostatic Union of Christ in respect of the Trinity. He explains Dionysius' obscure words about

*libet V q.1* extensively and nearly verbatim; see K. EMERY, JR., « Denys the Carthusian and the Doxography » (cf. nt. 4), pp. 344-346. The question concerns distinctions among the divine attributes, and is one of the most important in Denys' commentaries.

<sup>56</sup> DENYS, *De contemplatione* 1 aa.27-28,35 (*Op. om.* 41: 166D-169C', 176C-177B'). This last point explains why Denys treats the divine attributes before the Trinity in his *De laudibus Dei* and *De laudibus superlaudabilis Dei* (*Op. om.* 34: 327-536). These prose and poetic works would seem to emulate the divine praises of Hierotheus, in more expanded form (see below).

the « theandric acts » of the « manly-God » which many modern commentators think may be heretical in Chalcedonian terms, by reference to the doctrine of the « communication of idioms ». It is not the prerogative of commentators to criticize or judge Dionysius, Denys says; rather, it is their duty to expound his sublime expressions in the most reverent way, while acknowledging that some of them, because of their obscurity or blinding luminosity, may be construed erroneously by those whose minds are not truly illumined by the gift of wisdom. Indeed, one of the reasons Dionysius is not mentioned by other fathers before Gregory the Great may be because his writings were already in the hands of heretics<sup>57</sup>. Although the divine and human natures of Christ are inseparably united in the divine person, nevertheless the mind is capable of considering the perfections of nature, grace and glory in his human soul and body in themselves, separately from his divinity but as a consequence of their personal union with it; it is in this respect that contemplation of the humanity of Christ lies beneath contemplation of the divine simplicity and attributes. Accordingly, the highest mode of contemplating the Passion of Christ leads ineluctably to a consideration of the unity of the divine attributes, of God's justice and mercy, omnipotence and kenotic love, etc<sup>58</sup>.

Dionysius was a disciple of St. Paul. He was also the disciple of another master, from whom he learned the profundities of philosophic speculation in relation to revelation, the Greek convert Hierotheus. Whether or not the mysterious 'Hierotheus' signifies some actually existing person the presence of this exemplary figure in the Dionysian corpus is structurally appropriate, in order to

<sup>57</sup> DENYS, *In Epp. III-IV ad Caium* (*Op. om.* 16: 507-511, esp. 511A'-D'); *In CH* c.1 a.1 (*Op. om.* 15: 8B'-C'); *In DN* c.2 aa.12,16,19 (*Op. om.* 16: 54B-D', 62A-63A', 67B-69B').

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., DENYS, *De contemplatione* 1 aa.45-47 (*Op. om.* 41: 188A-192D).

establish the hierarchical order of the communication of divine wisdom. In *De divinis nominibus*, Dionysius says that his own writings are expanded commentaries on writings by Hierotheus concerning the same theological topics. Dionysius wrote his commentaries at the request of his disciple Timothy, who found the terse, sublime and therefore obscure writings of Hierotheus beyond his understanding. Hierotheus' writing on the divine names was based on the sacred Scriptures; in his book, Dionysius says, Hierotheus gathered into a compressed unity all of the « theological elements » and intelligible names of God that are scattered throughout the divinely inspired Scriptures<sup>59</sup>. Thus, Hierotheus derived his wisdom from the Scriptures and the teaching of apostolic men; Dionysius, in turn, unfolded and expanded the words of Hierotheus for the benefit of Timothy's understanding and for the understanding of other readers. Denys the Carthusian, in turn, through the translation of Dionysius' writings by the divinely illuminated Eriugena, unfolds and amplifies the words of Dionysius in more discursive terms for the benefit of the Scholastic and devout men of his own age.

In his divine praises of Jesus, which Dionysius recites for Timothy, Hierotheus compresses the scope of « discrete » and « united » theology into one utterance. Hierotheus proclaimed these praises, rapt in ecstasy, at the meeting in Jerusalem where he, some of the Apostles, Dionysius himself and other disciples gathered to gaze on « the one who begins life and the body that receives God » (« quando... in visionem vitam inchoantis et Deum recipientis corporis convenimus »). Like most commentators, Denys identifies the « body that receives God » as the Virgin Mary.

<sup>59</sup> PS-DIONYSIUS, *De divinis nominibus* c.3, interprete ERIUGENA (in *Op. om.* 16: 85); DENYS, *In DN* c.3 a.23 (*Op. om.* 16: 91C-C'). The term « theological elements » has led some scholars to conjecture that 'Hierotheus' is actually a code-name for Proclus. Formally speaking, the term signifies at least this: a Proclean model of wisdom, whereby principles are collected into terse propositions that in turn require expanded comment.

He rejects the interpretation that refers Dionysius' words to the vision of Christ seen at once by fifty disciples in different places, and also rejects the opinion of Thomas Gallus, who says that the text refers to a meeting at Jerusalem at which disciples gathered to discuss the Incarnation. The opinion of Albert the Great and the narrative in the *Legenda aurea* are more plausible: Dionysius is speaking of the gathering of the Apostles at the Dormition of the Virgin. But Dionysius mentions only two or three of the chief Apostles who were present in Jerusalem with Hierotheus and himself, whereas all of them were present at the Dormition. Denys prefers the interpretation of « some others who consider the matter better ». (The interpretation is probably Denys' own.) Many of the Greek philosophers converted by St. Paul, including Hierotheus and Dionysius, longed for some vision of the Word-made-flesh, whose reality resolved the ancient impasse of Platonic philosophy. Jesus, however, was already ascended to the Father. Paul devised the next best thing: through the Apostle John he arranged for his converts to meet the living God-bearer in Jerusalem. Ubertino of Casali reports that when at that meeting Dionysius saw the Virgin bathed in dazzling light and surrounded by angelic hosts, astonished and amazed he immediately fell to the ground; if through his new faith and philosophic principles he had not known that there was only one God, he would have thought that he saw another before his eyes. Ignatius of Antioch corroborates that such meetings took place; in letters he wrote to John in Jerusalem, he urged the Evangelist to arrange for him a meeting with the Virgin; in another letter to the Virgin herself, he implored that he and other neophytes might visit her<sup>60</sup>. Within the

<sup>60</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.3 a.24 (*Op. om.* 16: 94D-96C'). Denys amplifies the same interpretation and the same sources in *De dignitate et laudibus beatae Virginis Mariae* 1 a.29 and 4 a.5 (*Op. om.* 35: 54B'-56D, 154D'-156C). Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Dionysium de Div. nom.* c.3 (Editio Coloniensis 37.1), p. 110 lines 29-53; IACOPO DA VAREZZE (JACOBUS DE VORAGINE), *Legenda aurea (De Assumptione beate Virginis Marie, De sancto Dionysio et sociis eius)*, vol. 2, ed. G.P. MAGGIONE (Edizioni el Galluzzo: Millennio Medievale 6 Testi 3),

hierarchical order of theological wisdom, this unusual legend is *conveniens*: the writings of Hierotheus and Dionysius, who saw the God-bearer and were instructed directly by Paul and other apostolic men, stand just below the divinely inspired writings of those who had conversed with the Word-made-flesh himself.

According to Denys' exposition, Hierotheus' praises of Jesus, inspired by his direct sight of the Virgin-Mother, recapitulate the descending order of theological wisdom announced by Dionysius in the opening chapters of *De divinis nominibus*, moving from praise of the divine Word, the second person of the Trinity, in whom all things are known, through whom all things are created, and in whom all beings are sustained, to praise of the operations of the divine essence *ad extra*, to praise of the God-man « essentialized » in human nature<sup>61</sup>.

From what Dionysius says about Hierotheus' writings, Denys comments, it is clear that he possessed the science of divine realities in every mode of theology — mystical and intelligible, negative and affirmative, symbolic — sometimes expressing himself in one mode and then in another<sup>62</sup>. Hierotheus learned divine science from the Apostles themselves, notably Paul, from a disciplined inquisition of the Scriptures illumined by the gifts of the Spirit, and through direct « divine inspiration ». In his rapture at the meeting in Jerusalem, for example, these sources of wisdom were united

Firenze – Todi, 1998, pp. 781-782, 1047; THOMAS GALLUS (ABBAS VERCELLENSIS), *Paraphrasis Dionysii De divinis nominibus* c.3 (in *Op. om.* 16: 102-103); UBERTINUS DE CASALI, *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu* 4 c.38, with intro. by C.T. DAVIS (Monumenta politica et philosophica rariora ser. 1 no. 4), Venice, 1485: rept. Torino, 1961, p. 398a; PS-IGNATIUS ANTIOCHENUS, *Epistolae Johanni et B. V. Mariae*, printed in *PG* 5: 941-946 (Denys quotes from three of the four letters in the set). Concerning the pseudo-Ignatian letters, which may have been translated into Latin by Robert Grosseteste, see S.H. THOMSON, pp. 58-62.

<sup>61</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.2 a.20 (*Op. om.* 16: 69B-72C').

<sup>62</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.2 a.19 (*Op. om.* 16: 68C-69A').

in one act of simplified intelligence in the *apex mentis*. Denys explains Hierotheus' « divine inspiration » in terms of his own mystical theory. Passively more than actively, Hierotheus received a supernatural illumination from God that yielded a naked understanding of the deity. Purified by this light and sapiential intelligence, his mind discovered the *rationes* of all of the articles of faith and attained an unteachable knowledge and mystical contemplation of God. He enjoyed the summit of mystical contemplation, which is a « most secret locution of the mind with God and a serene insight into his incomprehensible deity, drawing together the realities pertaining to faith and exposing their rationality, connection and consonance ». Through this contemplation the pure and fervid mind is rapt and absorbed in God, immersed in his bounties, drawn into the abyss of inaccessible light, and thereby ineffably united with its Creator. Such illumination engenders a corresponding affection in the will and an inflamed, loving union with God. By means of this limped intelligence of the truth and an equal and connatural affection for it, the mind judges rightly about God and all divine realities<sup>63</sup>. In sum, Hierotheus was a participator and exemplar of mystical theology; his mind was extended into the region of infinite light, and by the boiling ardor of his charity he was liquefied in God. In his raptures he likewise suffered a mystical death, his sensible life failing nearly completely<sup>64</sup>.

Dionysius tells Timothy that whenever Hierotheus judged it opportune, he manifested his insights to others, leading them to a deeper understanding of the Scriptures according to the capacities of their minds<sup>65</sup>. By the powers of his mind and genius, Hierotheus was separate from the common genus of men. His highly speculative *sententiae*, binding into single expressions many realities and goods that are desirable *per se*, represent a certain second *eloquia*. Denys

<sup>63</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.2 a.19 (*Op. om.* 16: 67B-69B').

<sup>64</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.3 a.25 (*Op. om.* 16: 96C'-D').

<sup>65</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.3 a.25 (*Op. om.* 16: 97A-B').

comments that Hierotheus' speech may be understood as « second » in relation to conceptual angelic « mental language », or in relation to the words of the Apostles and the canonical Scriptures<sup>66</sup>. In his writings, then, Hierotheus exposed divine truths « subtly, profoundly and sententiously », showing those things which are most intelligible, clear and lucid in themselves but which are very obscure to us. Hierotheus ordered Dionysius to open his brief speech, which comprehends many truths, to others, in a manner more proportionate to the capacities of their intellects. So Dionysius explained Hierotheus' writing on the divine names to Timothy, by unfolding its potent sentences, drawing out conclusions, and showing the coherence of the contemplative objects about which it speaks<sup>67</sup>. Dionysius did not presume to insinuate any new conceptions into Hierotheus' « few and minimal words »<sup>68</sup> or to add anything to his « discrete and ordered writings », as if he the student were greater than his master<sup>69</sup>; rather, he discussed, prosecuted and drew distinctions in what Hierotheus said by means of « more subtle investigations », that is, Denys says, by treating many subtle questions that arise in Hierotheus' books and by descending to the particulars implied in his principled and compendious words. Denys emphasizes that Dionysius does not claim to move more subtle questions than did Hierotheus, but to treat acute *dubitaciones* arising from his difficult words in a manner proportionate to more discursive minds. Such an exposition is in no way irreverent, for as Gregory the Great asks, « What good is it to speak about the angelic choirs if we do not strive to explain their offices more subtly?<sup>70</sup> ».

The hierarchical law of intellectual communication, exemplified in the transmission of theological wisdom from Hiero-

<sup>66</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.3 a.23 (*Op. om.* 16: 93A-A').

<sup>67</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.3 a.23 (*Op. om.* 16: 92A'-93A).

<sup>68</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.2 a.19 (*Op. om.* 16: 69A-B').

<sup>69</sup> Cf. DENYS, *In DN* c.3 a.23 (*Op. om.* 16: 94B'-C').

<sup>70</sup> DENYS, *In DN* c.3 a.25 (*Op. om.* 16: 99A'-D').



theus to Dionysius to Timothy, applies as well to Denys the Carthusian's commentaries on the books of his « most-elect teacher ». So in his commentaries on the writings of Dionysius and even more expansively in his commentaries on the *Sentences* and in other treatises, Denys unfolds and amplifies the Areopagite's sublime and obscure words, and in a Scholastic manner draws consequences and resolves doubts and subtle questions provoked by them. Such expositions serve those who are on the way to perfection and already proficient in divine matters. The communication of wisdom must also extend to beginners. One cannot instruct others efficiently unless through long exercise they are already well-practiced in the virtues. Unless one has learned to cast aside phantasms and has put to rest the inquietude arising from the passions and vices, he will never come to a clear intuition and affective intelligence of the spiritual realities contained in the Scriptures. So one must impart « devotional and moral documents » to those who are less devout, showing them how to advance in the school of virtues so that each will discover his vocation, state and grade<sup>71</sup>. In this comment, Denys shows how his massive body of moral and devotional writings is incorporated into the Dionysian model of theological wisdom.

Dionysius' words about his master Hierotheus, Denys says, show how divine and meritorious it is to teach others. But in order to teach others in an orderly, charitable and sincere manner, one must first teach and preach to himself. Charity must first be instantiated in its proper subject, that is, oneself. To teach and preach to others in mere words (like the logicizing *Nominales*) without being purified by the virtues, illumined by the supernatural gift of wisdom and formed by charity is damnable and scandalous<sup>72</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> DENYS, *In DN c.3 a.23* (*Op. om.* 16: 93C'-94B). On Denys' moral writings, see K. EMERY, JR., « Denys the Carthusian and the Invention of Preaching Materials », in *Viator* 25 (1994), pp. 377-409 (Variorum CS, item X).

<sup>72</sup> DENYS, *In DN c.3 a.25* (*Op. om.* 16: 100A-A').

Denys' last remarks relate immediately to his commentaries on the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite. It is unlikely that any but he ever read them until they were printed from the autograph manuscripts by the Carthusians at Cologne in the sixteenth century. By that time, Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus and other humanists had undermined the apostolic authenticity of the Dionysian writings, despite the arguments of the Cologne Carthusians, who seem to have realized that the teaching of their own Dionysius was therefore jeopardized. Moreover, the Western Church was then preoccupied with other intellectual and ecclesiastical battles, which the Dionysian model of theology could not well serve; indeed, some like Luther came to despise Dionysius' doctrines<sup>73</sup>.

Disinterested modern scholars might see things differently. Denys the Carthusian's interpretation of the Dionysian writings is coherent, if one accepts (1) that the divine names are intelligible theophanies revealed in Scripture, which emanate from God and draw created intellects back to him; (2) that *De coelesti hierarchia* and *De divinis nominibus* must be read reciprocally with *De mystica theologia*; (3) that mystical theology speaks of an intellectual union with God, beyond all affirmations and negations,<sup>74</sup> which is dark and « unknowing » because the human mind is blinded by superabundant intelligibility and not because, locked in the circuit of sense, it stares into an empty nothingness; (5) that human minds are *consortes* in a vast and ordered community of wisdom. Perhaps now, more than a half-millennium

<sup>73</sup> See the essay by K. FROELICH, « Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century », in PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS: *The Complete Works*, trans. C. LUIBHEID / P. ROREM with introductions by J. PELIKAN / J. LECLERCQ / K. FROELICH and a Preface by R. ROQUES (The Classics of Western Spirituality). New York – Mahwah, N.J., 1987, pp. 33-46.

<sup>74</sup> PS-DIONYSIUS, *De mystica theologia* c.5, interprete ERIUGENA (in *Op. om.* 16: 466): « Neque est ejus universaliter positio, neque ablatio; sed eorum quae post eam sunt, positiones et ablationes facientes, ipsam neque auferimus neque ponimus: quoniam et super omnem positionem est perfecta et singularis

after his death, under the aegis of Sofia, it is good to remember the solitary, noble effort of one who strove to unite the Christian wisdom of the Greeks and the Latins.

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omnium causa, et super omnem ablationem excellentia omnium, simpliciter perfectione et summitas omnium ».